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My name is Cindy Christin. I have been a children's librarian at the Bozeman Public Library for 25 years. I have my Masters in Teaching and my background is in teaching young children. I am the mother of three daughters.

The focus on children ages 0-5 is the most exciting thing that has occurred in my career. Those of us who work with families and children have always known how critical those years are. But when the Public Library Association, the National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Health & Human Services, Nobel-prize winning economists and national business leaders, AND the President of the United States all make early learning a priority, then I feel confident that decision-makers in Montana can also address the issues facing families with young children.

We have over 62,000 children ages 0-5 in our state. We have learned that the early years lay the foundation for all future learning and success. . . so these children are Montana's future as well. If we want to have adults who thrive, work hard, pay taxes, and contribute to society, we have to start when they are young.

Children ages 0-5 need safety, healthy food, caring adults, and experience with language, books, and learning opportunities. They grow in an environment that provides positive social interactions, rich language exposure, and early literacy experience. If they're lucky, they get that at home. Sometimes they find this rich environment at day care or preschool. We need to ensure that *all Montana kids* have an opportunity to learn despite the family situation into which they are born.

Libraries need to be a part of the support system for families. Libraries are the one free place in almost every Montana community that offers resources for parents and kids. Public libraries provide books, information, a safe and warm place, parental support, and social connection at a time when families need it most.

According to the most recent statistics, 23% of Montana's children under age 5 live in poverty (*2012 Montana Kids Count*). It's even more important that we help children in poverty, because that's where we see the biggest return for taxpayers. Providing the resources for them now reduces what they will need later, and what we will inevitably have to pay for later.

There is a big gap between what we know and what we do. We know the importance of these early years, but less than 4% of public money is spent on education and development during this time of a child's life. (*Montana Kids Count*) We also know that the most effective way to remediate the disadvantage caused by adverse family environments is to invest in children when they are young. Let's invest in all of our kids now, when we can do the most good. We can work together towards this goal, in our libraries, schools, communities, city councils, legislatures, and anywhere else we serve families with young children. Thank you for your hard work on behalf of Montana kids.

Education & Local Gov't Committee
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Exhibit 19